VEGETATIVE FILTERS

Definition

A vegetative filter is an area designed to remove suspended solids and other pollutants from stormwater runoff flowing through a length of vegetation called a vegetated filter strip. The vegetation in a filter strip can range from turf and native grasses to herbaceous and woody vegetation, all of which can either be planted or indigenous. It is important to note that all runoff to a vegetated filter strip must both enter and flow through the strip as sheet flow. Failure to do so can severely reduce and even eliminate the filter strip's pollutant removal capabilities.

The total suspended solid (TSS) removal rate for vegetative filters will depend upon the vegetated cover in the filter strip. Table 6.11-1 below presents the adopted TSS removal rates for various vegetated covers. The TSS removal rates are the maximum achievable rates in each category of vegetation.

Table 6.11-1: Adopted TSS Removal Rates for Vegetated Filter Strips

Vegetated Cover	Adopted TSS Removal Rate
Turf grass	60 %
Native Grasses, Meadow, and Planted Woods	70 %
Indigenous woods	80 %

For filter strips with multiple vegetated covers, the final TSS removal rate should be based upon a weighted average of the adopted rates shown above in Table 6.11-1. This weighted average removal rate should be based upon the relative flow lengths through each cover type.

Purpose

A vegetative filter is intended to remove pollutants from runoff flowing through it. Vegetated filter strips can be effective in reducing sediment and other solids and particulates, as well as associated pollutants such as hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and nutrients. The pollutant removal mechanisms include sedimentation, filtration, adsorption, infiltration, biological uptake, and microbial activity.

Vegetated filter strips with planted or indigenous woods may also create shade along water bodies that lower aquatic temperatures, provide a source of detritus and large woody debris for fish and other aquatic organisms, and provide habitat and corridors for wildlife.

Condition Where Practice Applies

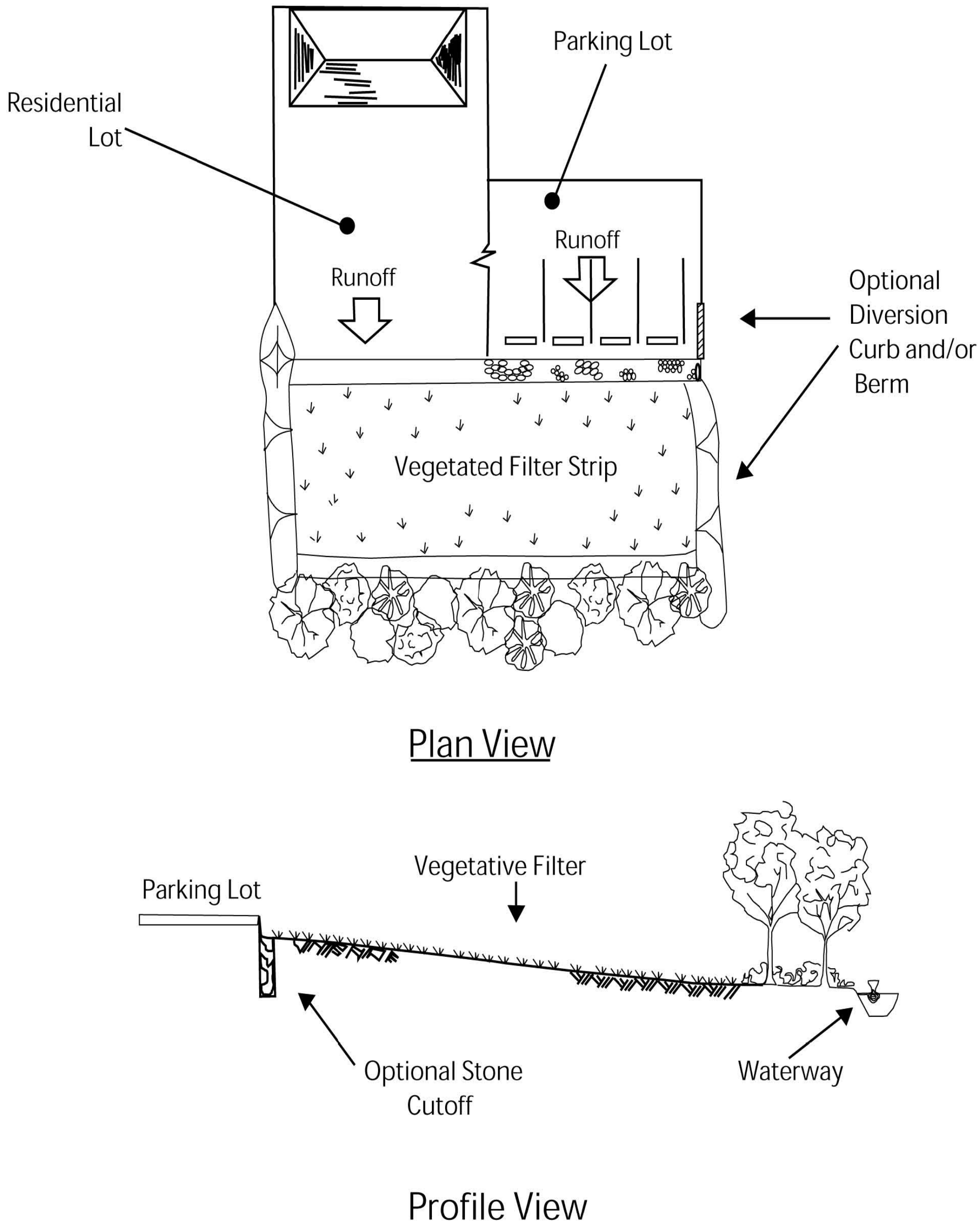
A vegetative filter can be effective only where the runoff entering and flowing through the strip remains as sheet flow and does not concentrate. This sheet flow requirement limits the use of vegetated filter strips in two ways. First, the area used for the filter strip itself must be mildly sloped and uniformly graded to maintain sheet flow or, in the case of indigenous areas, have surface features that retard, pond, and/or disperse runoff generally over the entire filter width. Second, since the runoff to a filter strip must enter the strip as sheet flow, the drainage area to the strip must also be uniformly graded and have a relatively horizontal downstream edge where it meets the upstream end of the filter strip. Such drainage areas may include yards, parking lots, and driveways where runoff flows as sheet flow. As a result, an area with irregular grading and other surface features that cause runoff to concentrate could neither be used as a vegetated filter strip nor have its runoff treated by one. For the same reasons, vegetated filter strips are also not intended to treat concentrated discharges from storm sewers, swales, and channels.

As detailed below in *Design Criteria*, additional factors must be considered. First, the vegetation in all filter strips must be dense and remain healthy and, in the case of planted or indigenous woods, have an effective mulch or duff layer. In addition, a vegetated filter strip must have a maintenance plan and be protected by an easement, deed restriction, or other legal measure that guarantees its existence and effectiveness in the future. Depending upon their TSS removal rate, vegetated filter strips can be used separately or in conjunction with other stormwater quality practices to achieve an overall pollutant removal goal.

Design Criteria

The primary design parameters for a vegetated filter strip are its slope, type of vegetated cover, and the type of soils within its drainage area. These three parameters are then used to determine the standard filter strip length required to achieve the adopted TSS removal rates shown above in Table 6.11-1. In addition, since runoff from the stormwater quality design storm must enter and continue as sheet flow over this length, the peak runoff rate must be sufficiently low and uniformly distributed to ensure such conditions. This peak runoff rate is achieved by limiting the sheet flow length that runoff will flow before entering the filter strip. This length limitation, in turn, limits the size of the drainage area to the filter strip and, consequently, the peak runoff rate. Details of these and other design parameters are presented below. The components of a typical vegetated filter strip are shown in Figure 6.11-1.

Figure 6.11-1 Vegetative Filter Components



Source: Adapted from Schueler and Claytor 1996.

A. Drainage Area and Runoff Characteristics

As noted above, runoff from a drainage area may be directed to flow through a filter strip provided it enters the filter strip and continues through it as sheet flow. In addition, the peak rate and maximum depth of runoff entering the filter strip must be low enough to allow the strip's vegetated cover to serve as an effective filter. As such, the maximum drainage area to a vegetated filter strip will be limited to an area 100 feet long for impervious surfaces and 150 feet long for pervious surfaces. These lengths are to be measured in the direction of flow to the upstream edge of the filter strip.

In addition, the interface of the drainage area and the upstream edge of the filter strip must be as horizontal as possible (perpendicular to the flow direction) so that runoff will be evenly distributed along the upstream edge of the strip. As shown in Figure 6.11-1, a stone cutoff trench, recessed curb, or other measure may be used along the filter's upstream edge to help distribute the runoff and dissipate some of its energy as it enters the filter strip.

As noted above, the required strip lengths are based in part upon the type of soils within the filter strip's drainage area. Table 6.11-2 below lists the various types of soils and their associated Hydrologic Soil Groups that will affect the strip's required length. County Soil Surveys and onsite soil investigations can be used to determine these soil types. Where more than one type of soil exists in a drainage area, the soil with the smallest particle size (and, consequently, the longest filter strip length) should be used in the filter strip's design.

B. Filter Strip Cover

As noted above, the vegetation in a filter strip can range from turf and native grasses to herbaceous and woody vegetation, all of which can either be planted or indigenous. The type of vegetation used in the filter strip can be very broad, although the best performance is associated with those with dense growth patterns such as turf-forming grasses and dense forest floor vegetation. All vegetation must be dense and healthy. In addition, planted woods must have a mulch layer with a minimum thickness of 3 inches, while indigenous woods must have at least a 1 inch thick natural duff layer.

Further information and references are presented in *Chapter XX: Landscaping.*

C. Filter Strip Grading

As noted above, the area used for a vegetated filter strip itself must be mildly sloped and uniformly graded to maintain sheet flow or, in the case of indigenous areas, have surface features that retard, pond, and/or disperse runoff generally over the entire filter width. As such, indigenous areas such as meadows and woods under consideration as vegetated filter strips should be surveyed and inspected during runoff events to determine runoff flow patterns. Indigenous areas with surface features that obstruct or retard runoff flow, cause ponding, and/or disperse runoff are acceptable, while those with surface features that cause runoff to concentrate are not. It should be noted that such observations must be made with consideration for the proposed volume and peak rate of runoff that the area would receive as a vegetated filter strip.

D. Maximum Filter Strip Slope

In addition to the soils within a vegetated filter strip's drainage area, the soils within the filter strip itself are also important for determining filter strip's maximum allowable slope. Table 6.11-2 below presents maximum filter strip slopes for various vegetated covers and soil types within the filter strip. Web Soil Surveys and onsite soil investigations can be used to determine the soil type within a filter strip.

> Note: The vegetative filters designed for the purposes of the water quality design/sizing criteria must comply with requirements of *Standards for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control in New Jersey*.

Table 6.11-2: Maximum Filter Strip Slope

Filter Strip Soil Type	Hydrologic Soil Group	Maximum Filter Strip Slope (Percent)	
		Turf Grass, Native Grasses, and Meadows	Planted and Indigenous Woods
Sand	A	7	5
Sandy Loam	B	8	7
Loam, Silt Loam	B	8	8
Sandy Clay Loam	C	8	8
Clay Loam, Silty Clay, Clay	D	8	8

E. Required Filter Strip Length

To achieve the adopted TSS removal rates shown above in Table 6.11-1, the required filter strip length can be determined from Figures 6.11-2 to 5 below based upon the filter strip's slope, vegetated cover, and the soil within its drainage area. As shown in the figures, the minimum length for all vegetated filter strips is 25 feet.

Figure 6.11-2: Vegetated Filter Strip Length
Drainage Area Soil: Sand HSG: A

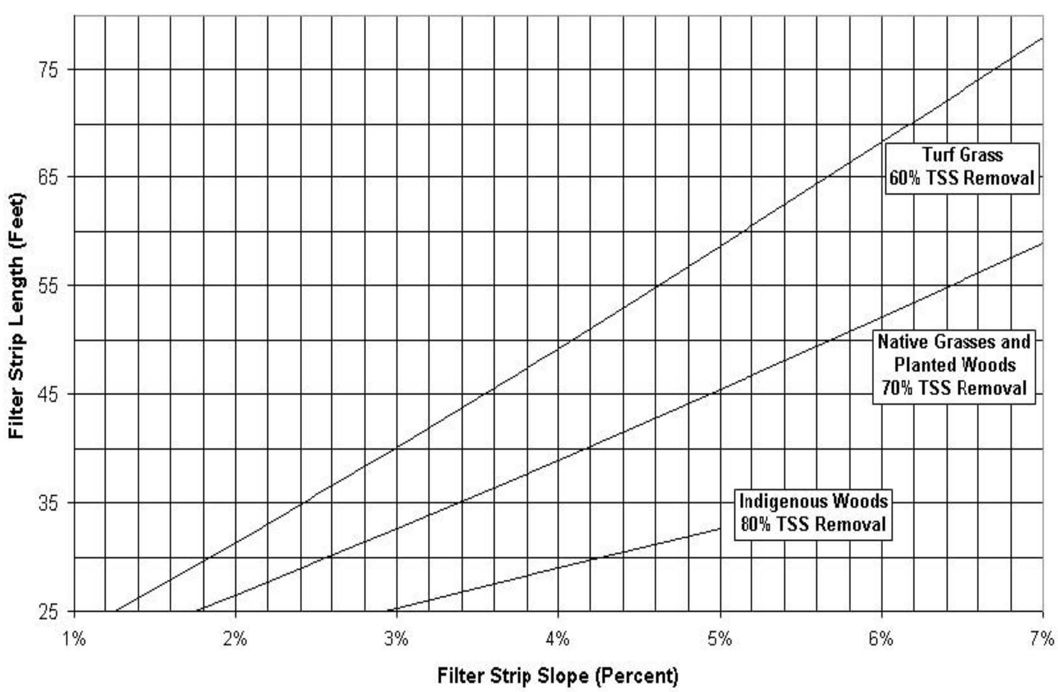


Figure 6.11-3 – Vegetated Filter Strip Length
Drainage Area Soil:
------------ Loam, Silt Loam HSG: B
———— Sandy Loam HSG: B

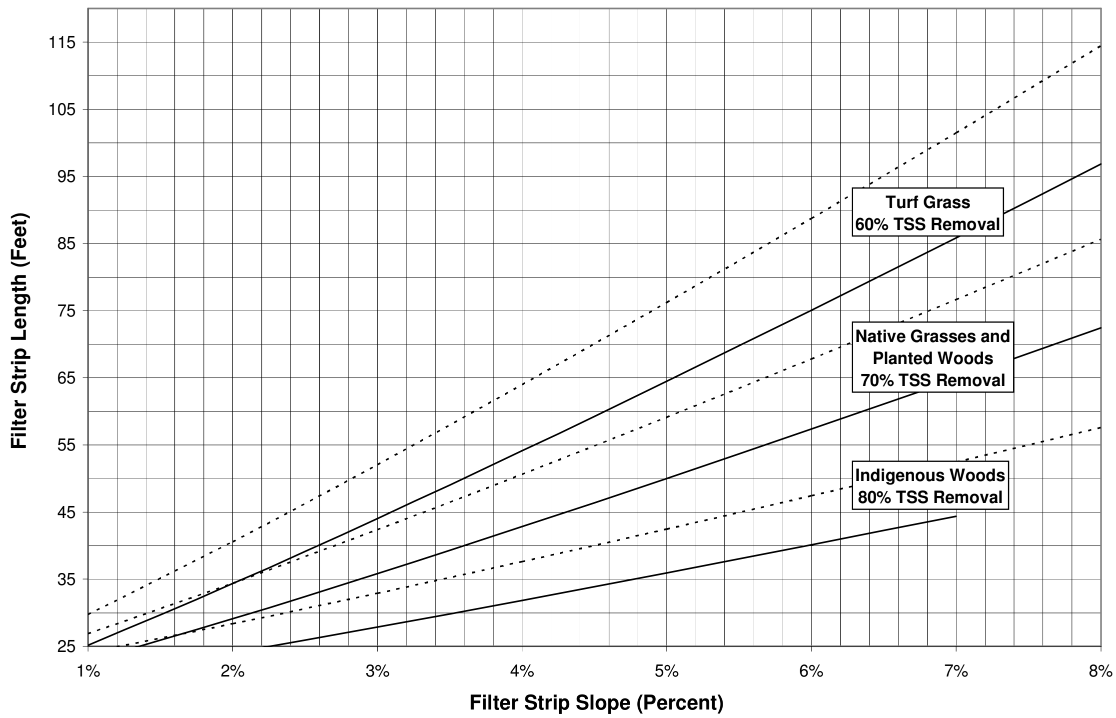


Figure 6.11-4: Vegetated Filter Strip Length
Drainage Area Soil: Sandy Clay Loam HSG: C

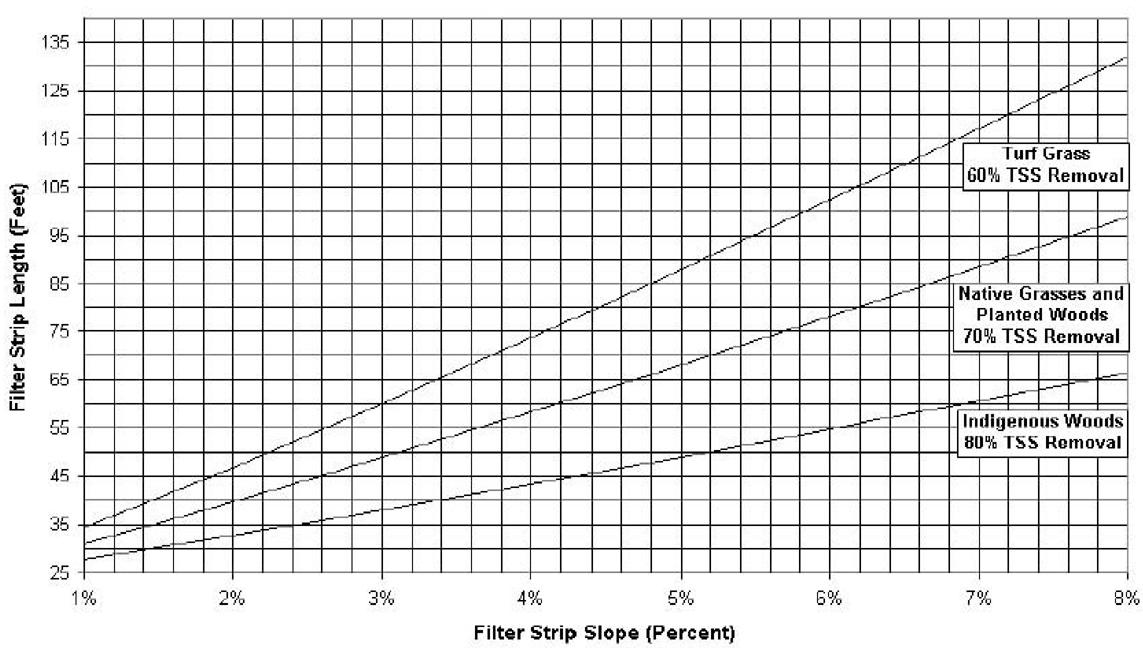
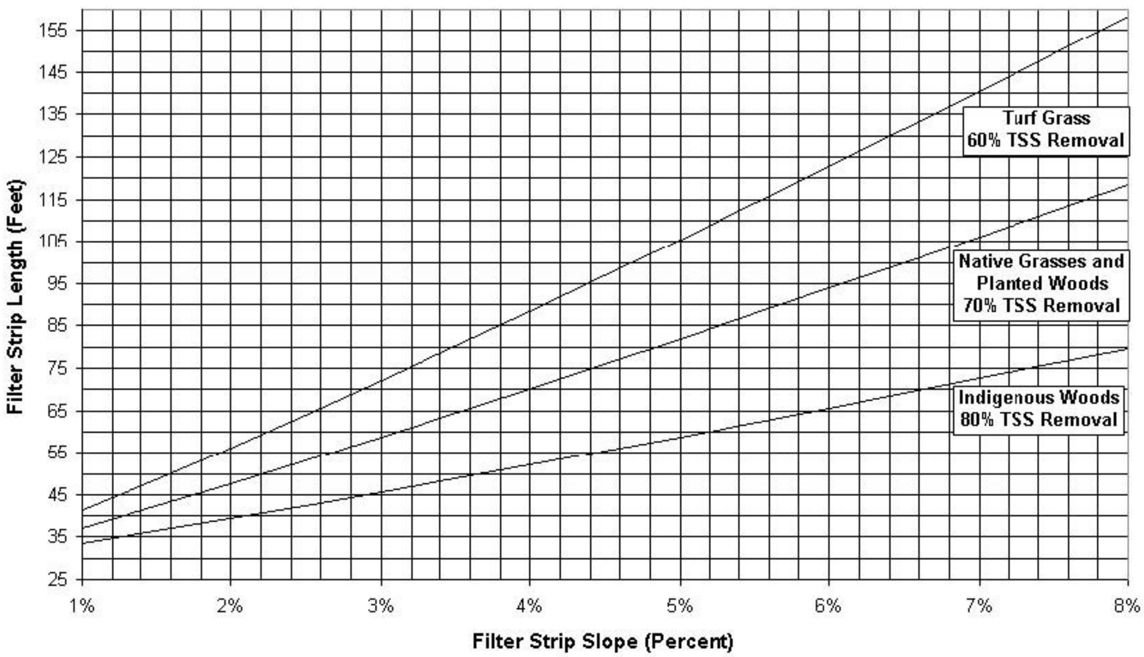


Figure 6.11-5: Vegetated Filter Strip Length
Drainage Area Soil: Clay Loam, Silty Clay, Clay HSG: D



Example 6.11-1: Computing Required Vegetated Filter Strip Length

A vegetated filter strip is to be installed at a uniform 5 percent slope to treat the runoff from a drainage area consisting of a paved parking lot and turf grass lawn. Runoff from the parking lot and lawn will enter the filter strip as sheet flow. The maximum sheet flow lengths across the parking lot and lawn do not exceed 100 and 150 feet, respectively. The soil in the drainage area is a silt loam. Compute the required filter strip length if the strip is to be vegetated with turf grass.

1. Determine the Hydrologic Soil Group of the drainage area soil. From Table 6.11-2, a silt loam is in Hydrologic Soil Group B.
2. Determine the maximum slope of the filter strip. Also from Table 6.11-2, the maximum slope of a turf grass filter strip with Hydrologic Soil Group B soils is 8 percent, which is greater than the 5 percent slope of the proposed filter strip.
3. Determine the required length of the filter strip. From Figure 6.11-4 for silt loam soils, the required length of a turf grass filter strip with a 5 percent slope is approximately 76 feet. The resultant TSS removal rate for the turf grass filter strip will be 60 percent.

Maintenance

Effective vegetated filter strip performance requires regular and effective maintenance. *Chapter XX: Maintenance of Stormwater Management Measures* provides information and requirements for preparing a maintenance plan for stormwater management facilities, including vegetated filter strips. Specific maintenance requirements for vegetated filter strips are presented below. These requirements must be included in the filter strip's maintenance plan.

A. General Maintenance

All vegetated filter strip components expected to receive and/or trap debris and sediment must be inspected for clogging and excessive debris and sediment accumulation twice annually and as needed. Such components may include vegetated areas and stone cutoffs and, in particular, the upstream edge of the filter strip where coarse sediment and/or debris accumulation could cause inflow to concentrate.

Sediment removal should take place when the filter strip is thoroughly dry. Disposal of debris and trash should be done only at suitable disposal/recycling sites and must comply with all applicable local, state, and federal waste regulations.

B. Vegetated Areas

Mowing and/or trimming of vegetation must be performed on a regular schedule based on specific site conditions. Grass should be mowed at least once a month during the growing season. Vegetated areas must be inspected at least annually for erosion and scour. Vegetated areas should also be inspected at least annually for unwanted growth, which should be removed with minimum disruption to the planting soil bed and remaining vegetation.

When establishing or restoring vegetation, biweekly inspections of vegetation health should be performed during the first growing season or until the vegetation is established. Once established, inspections of vegetation health, density, and diversity should be performed during both the growing and non-growing season at least twice annually. The vegetative cover must be maintained at 85 percent. If vegetation has greater than 50 percent damage, the area must be reestablished in accordance with the original specifications and the inspection requirements presented above.

All use of fertilizers, mechanical treatments, pesticides and other means to assure optimum vegetation health must not compromise the intended purpose of the vegetative filter. All vegetation deficiencies should be addressed without the use of fertilizers and pesticides whenever possible.

All areas of the filter strip should be inspected for excess ponding after significant storm events. Corrective measures should be taken when excessive ponding occurs.

C. Other Maintenance Criteria

The maintenance plan must indicate the approximate time it would normally take for the filter strip to drain the maximum design storm runoff volume and begin to dry. This normal drain time should then be used to evaluate the filter's actual performance. If significant increases or decreases in the normal drain time are observed or if the 72 hour maximum is exceeded, the filter strip's planting soil bed, vegetation, and groundwater levels must be evaluated and appropriate measures taken to comply with the maximum drain time requirements and maintain the proper functioning of the filter strip.

***Note*: The Considerations section below is provided to assist the designer in enhancement of Vegetative Filters. However, consistency with these considerations is not required in order to receive the TSS removal rate for this BMP.**

Considerations

A number of factors should be considered when utilizing a vegetated filter strip to treat stormwater runoff. Most importantly, an adequate filter area and length of flow must be provided to achieve the desired treatment. Slopes of less than 5 percent are more effective; steeper slopes require a greater area and length of flow to achieve the same effectiveness. Good surface and subsurface drainage is necessary to ensure satisfactory performance. The designer should also be aware of potential ponding factors during the planning stage. Dry period between flows should be achieved in order to reestablish aerobic soil conditions.

Filter strip vegetation must be fully established before incoming stormwater flow is allowed. At least one full growing season should have elapsed prior to strip functioning as part of the stormwater management system. Further information and references on filter strip vegetation are presented in *Chapter XX*. Species must be appropriate for the region, soil, and shade condition. Mulching is required for both seeded and planted filter strips.

Perhaps the most common, naturally occurring filter strips are those upland vegetative stands associated with floodplains or found adjacent to natural watercourses. In some cases, preservation of these upland areas will allow them to continue to function as filter strips. To help ensure the longevity of these natural areas under altered and perhaps increased pollutant loading, a top dressing of fertilizer and supplemental plantings may be necessary.

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